

HENRY HOBSON RICHARDSON :
HIS ROLE IN THE MODERN MOVEMENT

by

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A DISSERTATION

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PREFACE

A happy indication of America's cultural "coming of age" is the growing awareness on the part of the people in general of our unique artistic heritage. From the standpoint of actual years, it is almost too young to be called a heritage, but in exhibiting the typical characteristics of American life, in itself a unique phenomenon among the nations of the world, and in expressing them with a richness of variety worthy of the diverse origins of our people, it justifies the interest and study now being devoted to it.

It is with the hope of deepening in some small measure the interest in all things American that the writer has chosen to study the role of Henry Hobson Richardson in the development of contemporary architecture. Whatever degree of success she has attained is due in great part to those who have generously assisted her. She is especially grateful to Mr. Francis Grubar for his guidance and extends sincere thanks also to the librarians of the Public Library of New Rochelle, N.Y., and to those of the Winn Memorial Library of Woburn, Mass., and the Crane Memorial Library of Quincy, Mass.

The writer is indebted most of all to the Ursuline Community of New Rochelle, whose interest and assistance have continued throughout the course of this work.

A special acknowledgment is due to all those students, alumnae and friends who helped to secure the photographs used in the illustrations. A few have been copied. Figures 52-58, credited to Carl Condit, are from The Rise of the Sky-scraper. Figures 46 and 48 are from H. R. Hitchcock's H. H. Richardson and His Times. Figure 51 is from L. Mumford's The Brown Decades. Figure 47 is from the files of the Pittsburgh Press. All the other illustrations are the author's.

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INTRODUCTION

A study of the works of Henry Hobson Richardson seems especially timely now, when so much interest is evinced in the nineteenth century's contribution to the revolutionary architecture of today. The names of Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright are familiar to the most cursory student of architecture. What is not so well known is the part that Richardson played in breaking the ground for them. For many years the name of Richardson, one of the most significant architects of the later nineteenth century, was permitted to fade into oblivion, lost under the shadows of the Romanesque piles with which he is invariably associated. The excellent monograph of Mrs. Schuyler van Rensselaer¹ and the eulogies of his contemporaries were forgotten. It was left to Lewis Mumford, writing in the second quarter of the present century, to reappraise the contribution of Richardson. Now, thanks to Mumford, his place is secure, even though writers and critics do not always concur with Mumford's assertion that Richardson was the first modern architect in America. Professor Hitchcock, in his definitive biography brought out on the occasion of the centenary of Richardson's birth,² places him instead as the last traditionalist. Other scholars can be found who agree with him. It is hoped that the presentation of the views of both sides will be of interest to the American reader whose pride in the progress of his country is balanced by his desire to know the truth.

This study will attempt to do three things. First, by sketching briefly the developments in American architecture up to the third quarter of the nineteenth century, it will present the foundations upon which Richardson and his contemporaries built. Secondly, by an examination of his life and most significant works in

¹ Mrs. Schuyler van Rensselaer, Henry Hobson Richardson and His Works (Boston: Houghton Mifflin & Company, 1898).

² Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Jr., The Architecture of H. H. Richardson and His Times (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1936).

the light of his times, it will show how, in spite of an eclectic training, he rose above mere surface treatment to a grasp of the essential elements of great architecture. Finally, it will consider the part he played in molding the thought of those who succeeded him.

CHAPTER I

THE BACKGROUND OF AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE

Henry Hobson Richardson has been quoted as saying that architecture, to be judged correctly, must be seen in its own surroundings.¹ He might have added, as doubtless he inferred, that architects, too, must be seen in their own surroundings if they are to be understood. But to see a building in relation to its terrain is a much simpler matter than to see a man in relation to his times. In addition to the social, economic, cultural, and artistic mentalities in which he is immersed, the sum-total of all the traditions from which these viewpoints have arisen must also be weighed. To estimate the work of Richardson and his contemporaries, then, one must first understand America in the nineteenth century, and the artistic traditions that had been built up in the preceding two hundred years.

The history of architecture in America has been largely a record of adaptations, some good, some bad, some functional, and some useless. The early colonial house, modelled on the half-timber construction so dear to the English-born colonist's heart, soon had to adapt itself to the rigors of the climate. The system of clapboard construction generally associated with the colonial style in New England was therefore devised.² Immediately an original note was introduced, leading to a new style whose differences from those of its medieval prototypes were mainly in the nature of structural adjustments. The medieval overhang is about the only vestige of the architecture of the mother country that the colonist kept for its own sake.³ The use of wood in New England, stone in New York and Pennsylvania, and

1

"The Architecture of H. H. Richardson and His Times," The Architectural Forum, LXIV (1936), 60.

2

Sigfried Giedion, Space, Time and Architecture (Cambridge: The Harvard University Press, 1946), p. 280.

3

David Robb and J. J. Garrison, Art in the Western World (New York: Harper & Bros., 1942), p. 289.

brick in the South also represents the ready adaptation of materials to the problems of building. (Figs. 1, 2.) But it was in the realm of planning that the first settlers struck their most distinctively American note. The flexible ground plan which Frank Lloyd Wright has used so advantageously came into being when the seventeenth century New England houses were enlarged by wings and lean-tos, a method unknown in Europe.⁴

The American Georgian house with its red brick or clapboard walls and white trim, elegant doorway and gracious hall, represents the adaptation of materials, of builders' guides, the limitations of craftsmen, and the exigencies of American living, to the production of distinguished buildings. (Figs. 3,4,5.)⁵ Thomas Jefferson, with his love for the temples of antiquity, had only scorn for the Georgian mansion of his day; but most critics, whether classic or romantic, modern or traditionalist,⁶ accord it at least a measure of praise. This is not true of the style that Jefferson himself inaugurated, nor of any of those immediately following him. From the early nineteenth century until the present day, the battle of the styles and of the critics goes on, never, it seems, to meet in any accord. "Jefferson," asserts the traditionalist, "appears above all as a lover of freedom, . . . but the freedom thus loved from youth was essentially the freedom of reason to reach its own conclusions, not freedom to degenerate into formless anarchy."⁷ "The Classic Revival in architecture," counters the modern, "represents a curious kind of cultural lag. Its method was inherited from the worst phase of Renaissance architecture--that academism which upheld the absolute authority of books."⁸

⁴
Giedion, op. cit., p. 290.

⁵
Lewis Mumford, The South in Architecture (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1941), p. 24.

⁶
Thomas Tallmadge, The Story of Architecture in America (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1936), p. 76.

⁷
Fiske Kimball, American Architecture (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1928), p. 70.

⁸
Hugh Morrison, Early American Architecture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 570.



Fig.1
Dutch Reformed Church, Fishkill, N.Y., 1784



Fig.2
Congregational Church, Madison, Conn., 1838



Fig.3



Fig.4



Fig.5

Three New England Georgian Homes, Quincy, Massachusetts

The Greek revival of the last century, the Gothic revival of the first half of the present century, . . . and all the various subordinate revivals. . . have failed, because they were revivals of perfected styles, incapable of further progression; they were quotations, admirable for their archaeological correctness, and for the skill with which they were adapted to modern uses. But they infused no new life into modern architecture. . . .

9

So declared Henry Van Brunt as long ago as 1886. As recently as 1942,

Talbot Hamlin, defender of the Greek revival, wrote:

It was, in fact, precisely the period of the so-called Greek Revival. . . that saw the greatest outburst of independence and variety in house planning which this country knew before the Civil War. People were building houses to fit themselves, their families, their sites, and their climate;¹⁰ the older, traditional forms were rapidly giving place to many new types.

Speaking of those very same Greek revival houses, Suzanne La Follette holds the exact opposite:

Only a people which had lost all sense of the essential relation between architecture and life would have endured the inconvenience of an architecture of exteriors, well adapted to the needs of a people which lived most of its life in the open and not at all to those of a people forced by a northern climate to conduct most of its activities indoors.¹¹

Just as great a divergence of opinion can be found in regard to the Gothic revival and, for that matter, in regard to every succeeding style up to the present day. Whatever our architectural persuasion may be, however, it seems only just to admit that at the time of Jefferson a new element came to be emphasized. The exterior forms of historical styles gradually took precedence over the functional adaptations that had persisted even in the Georgian period.¹² Despite the personal genius of Jefferson and his judicious use of Roman forms, the trend thereafter was, for the most part, towards the imitation of historical styles rather than the

9

Henry Van Brunt, "Henry Hobson Richardson, Architect," The Atlantic Monthly, LVIII (1886), 686.

10

Talbot Hamlin, "The Greek Revival in America and Some of Its Critics," The Art Bulletin, XXIV (1942), 247.

11

Suzanne La Follette, Art in America (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1929), p. 107.

12

Ibid., p. 99.

intelligent use of their principles in the solution of the contemporary problem. Talbot Hamlin would hardly concur with this statement, and, in the article already referred to, goes to some pains to quote architects of the Greek revival whose views substantiate his claim;¹³ but even he, "dean of architectural historians" though he be,¹⁴ has been criticized for his stand.

The fact remains that the nineteenth century was marked by a series of revivals. Jefferson deliberately cultivated Roman forms because he believed that the spirit of the ancient republic was most suited to the needs of an infant republic.¹⁵ Greek and Gothic revivals followed, the latter overlapping the Romanesque of Richardson. In every instance there were political, social, and literary factors involved in the development of each phase. In Europe as well, neoclassic and romantic movements in literature, architecture, and sculpture preceded those of America by several years.

One of the reasons for the Greek revival's popularity was the Greek struggle for independence. Americans watched with approval a battle so similar in spirit to their own revolution of the century before. With characteristic naïveté they expressed their sympathy by building towns with Greek names and lining their shady streets with Greek temples (in modest wood) marking their expansion westward.¹⁶ (Fig. 2.) Whatever we may think of this style as applied to homes, there is much to be said in its favor. Certainly the public buildings erected in the Greek revival manner have an air of impeccable good breeding that has done much to dignify the appearance of many an American city. It is easy to understand how young America, with the unadmitted insecurity of youth, should ape the culture of Europe until it felt old enough to boast one of its own. Strickland built his Bank of the United States, the

13

Hamlin, op. cit., 246.

14

C.L.V. Meeks, "Greek Revival Architecture in America," The Art Bulletin, XXVI (1944), 283-286.

15

Agnes Addison, Romanticism and the Gothic Revival (New York: Richard R. Smith, 1938), p. 131.

16

La Follette, op. cit., p. 105.

forerunner of future banks of America, "in the style of the Parthenon," and Thomas U. Walter girded Andalusia with a Grecian colonnade. Only a few thought of inquiring as to the process of thought by which the Greeks had progressed, by trial and error, to the perfection of the Parthenon and the Erechtheum.

Eventually men tired of the coldly classic exteriors that met them on all sides. Sir Walter Scott's novels were now read in every American home. Washington Irving had transformed "Sunnyside," his home at Tarrytown, into a Gothic dream.

(Fig. 6.) If the great works of the classic past had served as admirable models,¹⁷ could not the towers and turrets of the Middle Ages do the same? In 1836 A. J. Davis began, at New York University, the "collegiate Gothic" tradition that has persisted until the present day.¹⁸ Richard Upjohn did the same for churches with the erection of New York's Trinity Church in 1845. Renwick's St. Patrick's Cathedral, begun in 1853, was, like Trinity, an able interpretation on the surface, and together they established the Gothic as the correct ecclesiastical manner.

In the field of domestic architecture Orson Fowler invented the octagon house (Fig. 8), and A. J. Downing gave a lasting impetus to the building of country houses with his "bracketed villas" and "laborers' cottages."¹⁹ Asymmetry and the picturesque became the ideal. Gingerbread ornament began to adorn both church and home (Fig. 7). If, as Vincent Scully claims, Downing "laid the foundations for a whole new sequence of experiments in planning and spatial organization,"²⁰ it remains true that when his ideas were misinterpreted, they led to folly.

Matters went from bad to worse. The last of the old aristocratic leaders had died before 1830, and, in the words of Suzanne La Follette, "the rich and well-

¹⁷

Morrison, op. cit., p. 571.

¹⁸

Oliver Larkin, Art and Life in America (New York: Rinehart and Company, 1949), p. 170.

¹⁹

Vincent Scully, Jr. "Romantic Rationalism and the Expression of Structure in Wood," The Art Bulletin, XLIV (1953), 122.

²⁰

Ibid., p. 124.



Fig.6
"Sunnyside, Tarrytown, N.Y.



Fig.7
"Kingscote," Newport, R.I., 1838
by Richard Upjohn



Fig.8
Octogonal Library, Red Hook, N.Y., 1864



Fig.9
Montgomery Place, Barrytown, N.Y.
1843-63
A.J. Davis

born' were worsted, and the social and political power they had wielded passed into
 21
 the hands of the merely rich." Soon the results were plain to see. The material
 restraints that had kept the seventeenth century pioneers to the simplicity and
 austerity of an archaic age were gone. The cultural restraints that had curbed the
 eighteenth century aristocratic builders were no more. The carpenter-builders of
 Samuel McIntire's and John McComb's generation were dying out, and in their stead
 was arising the professional architect, who would become more and more, as the years
 22
 went on, a designer on paper rather than with the materials of building. The door
 was now open for the triumph of surface ornament. At the same time there occurred
 the triumph of the nouveau-riche as well. Good taste yielded to love of display,
 23
 and refinement bowed to novelty. While the Gothic revival continued to flourish,
 every other historical style and national manner was given a welcome in the homes
 of the wealthy. Italian villas, Swiss chalets, even "Turkish" and "Persian" man-
 sions arose on the shores of the Hudson or along Long Island Sound. Egyptian style
 prisons and cemetery gates, not to mention national monuments, shared honors with
 24
 Mohammedan villas, Chinese pagodas, and Hindu stupas. The crowning glory arrived
 25
 in mid-century, in the form of the mansard roof.

Into this chaos came, in 1855, the first Beaux-Arts trained American archi-
 tect, Richard Morris Hunt. A cultured man and a good student, he ranked far above
 his contemporaries in ability and taste. But he lacked the consuming necessity to
 create, and was satisfied to erect correct homes which pleased their wealthy owners,
 but departed not one whit from the lessons he had learned in France (Figs. 10 and 11).

21

Op. cit., p. 60.

22

Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Jr., H. H. Richardson, p. 12.

23

Larkin, op. cit., p. 175.

24

Clay Lancaster, "Oriental Forms in American Architecture 1800-1870,"
The Art Bulletin, XXIX (1947), 183-193.

25

Rosalie Thorne McKenna, "James Renwick, Jr. and the Second Empire Style
 in the United States," Magazine of Art, XLIV (1951), 97.



Fig.10

"Ochre Court," Newport, R.I., 1889-1891
by Richard Morris Hunt



Fig.11

"The Marble House," Newport, R.I.
1893-95 by Richard Morris Hunt

He did, nevertheless, make a real contribution to American architectural history, in the role of professional organizer. He began the atelier plan of instructing his assistants, was a founder of the American Institute of Architects, and, in the words of Charles Follen McKim, was "the pioneer and icebreaker who paved the way for the recognition of the profession by the public."²⁶ Despite Suzanne La Follette's condemnation of his sumptuous buildings,²⁷ his refined taste, evident in the William K. Vanderbilt House on Fifth Avenue, completed in 1881, and in other homes of the wealthy, can be justly esteemed for its restraining influence in an era of vulgar ostentation.

When Hunt first returned to America there was no other native architect who could boast a training as professional as his. There were men of good taste and high ideals who were doing their honest best. Russell Sturgis, William Robert Ware, and Henry Van Brunt were among the more significant. But if they showed good will, they had little originality. Neither did the recently established architectural schools do much to foster a new and native style. Lewis Mumford, commenting on this period, says that one must assume that some of the famous buildings "were built by the blind for a generation that dwelt in darkness."²⁸ At the same time, the ignorance of the general public was such that they were willing to welcome anything new or different,²⁹ the good as well as the bad, with equal enthusiasm.

While artistic taste was at its lowest ebb, the practical side of America was already manifesting its strength and originality. Even during the worst years of the Civil War, northern industries were growing rapidly. Cities expanded, railroads were laid, and fortunes were made. In 1859, oil had been discovered in Pennsylvania, and gold and silver in Nevada. New farm machinery ushered in a period of

²⁶

W. Franklyn Paris, "Richard Morris Hunt," The Hall of American Artists (New York: New York University, 1952), 28.

²⁷

La Follette, op. cit., p. 254.

²⁸

Mumford, The South in Architecture, p. 92.

²⁹

Ibid.

agricultural expansion. A generation of millionaires was being born. Every big city was an architect's paradise.³⁰

Advancement was not confined to wealth and material progress. Literature of a high calibre had been coming out of New England for several years before the war, and Longfellow, Lowell, and Emerson had many fruitful years still to live. Thoreau had published Walden in 1854, and Whitman's Leaves of Grass appeared in 1855. Louisa May Alcott's first novel was published in 1864 and Whittier's Snow-bound came off the press in 1866.³¹ Romantic America was as thriving as practical America when Henry Hobson Richardson, the second native son trained in the Beaux-Arts, came home in 1865. The cultural climate was made to order for him. The field lay open to conquer, and conquer he did! With his romantic temperament, boundless optimism, and limitless energy, he had "his career to chase rather than guide."³² He might have made an easy fortune as just another eclectic. Hunt was content to multiply noble interpretations, exquisitely correct, for his wealthy patrons, of whom there were more than enough for Richardson to share. But Richardson was different. In his first works he leaned heavily on historical styles. Occasionally he experienced temporary setbacks. But for the most part he made astounding progress, by seeking always for the essential structural principles that underlay the style he was using. After only four years of practice he adopted the massive forms of southern French Romanesque as his point of departure. Then, by a gradual "stripping-off" process he developed a virile style of his own. Striving constantly for a logical, structural treatment of each problem, he eventually arrived at the elemental simplicity of his last great works.

Like every other great architect, Richardson had to suffer from the

30

Harold U. Faulkner, American Political and Social History (New York: F.S.Crofts and Company, 1944), pp. 360-363.

31

Richard Morris, Encyclopedia of American History (New York: Harper & Bros., 1953), pp. 568, 569, 631, 731.

32

Henry Adams, The Education of Henry Adams (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1918), p.64.

flattery of lesser men. Trinity Church begot scores of imitations, and Richardson was called the author of the Romanesque Revival. That his own work is a far cry from mere revival is attested by the structures of his mature period, but more especially by the steady development so evident throughout his whole career.

Richardson died in 1886, at the height of his career and the peak of his powers. Had he lived longer, the tides in taste and the trends in building would almost certainly have been different. ³³ His influence was cut short by the triumph of the classic revival so powerfully advanced by the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, and the importance of his contribution was lost sight of until recent years.

CHAPTER II

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF RICHARDSON

Henry Hobson Richardson was born on the Priestley plantation in St. James, Louisiana, September 29, 1838. He was a descendant on his mother's side of Doctor Joseph Priestley, the discoverer of oxygen.¹ His father, a native of Bermuda, died in 1854, and Mrs. Richardson later married John D. Bein. Young Richardson grew up in an atmosphere of comfort and well-being. A family friend sought a cadetship for him at West Point, but a slight speech impediment disqualified him,² and he attended Harvard instead, intending to become a civil engineer.

There is no record of his demonstrating outstanding achievement at Harvard in any subject except mathematics. The friends he made there remained close to him all their lives, and testify to the charm of his personality. Upon completing college, he had decided to become an architect. Why he changed from engineering is not known. However, his gift for drawing, in which he had training in his earliest years, coupled with his skill in mathematics, indicated that he made a wise choice.³

His stepfather offered to send the young man to Paris to study, and in 1859 Richardson sailed for France and the École des Beaux-Arts. He was hardly in Paris when the entrance examinations for the École began. With his customary optimism he attempted them, but failed everything except mathematics. Towards the end of 1860 the École accepted him and he began work in the atelier of M. André, only to be interrupted by the outbreak of the Civil War. "I burned with shame," he wrote to his fiancée in Boston, "when I read the capture of my city and I in Paris."⁴⁵

¹ Van Rensselaer, op. cit., p. 3.

² Ibid., p. 3.

³ Ibid., p. 5.

⁴ Ibid., p. 5

⁵ Ibid., p. 12.

Richardson returned to Boston, but, upon refusing to take the oath of allegiance to the northern states, was prevailed upon by his friends to return to Paris. This time his financial status was quite different from anything he had previously known. Money came from home only at irregular intervals and finally ceased altogether. Thrown on his own resources, he obtained work as a draughtsman, and could henceforth⁶ work only occasionally with his fellow-students.

What seemed at the time to be unfortunate was in reality a great gain.⁷ The practical experience derived from working in an established architect's office is always helpful, but Richardson was especially fortunate. His employer was the great Henri Labrouste, whose Bibliothèque Ste. Geneviève had established his reputation as an architect of great power.⁸ Richardson had an opportunity to reduce theory to practice under the most favorable conditions.

Although his time at the École was limited, Richardson gained from his studies an appreciation of French logic,⁹ a method of analysis, and a capacity for work.¹⁰ One of his French fellow-students said of him, "If the fact of his being a foreigner had not excluded him from the contests for the prix de Rome, he would have been among those most amply endowed for taking part in them."¹¹

Upon his return to America in 1865, Richardson had some difficulty in finding work. It was 1866 before he was given an opportunity, through the influence of a college friend, to compete with several recognized architects for the commission to build a Unitarian Church in Springfield, Massachusetts.¹² He won the competition

6

Ibid., p. 8.

7

Ibid., p. 9.

8

Giedion, op. cit., p. 155.

9

"The Architecture of H. H. Richardson and His Times," The Architectural Forum, XLIV (1936), 31.

10

Mumford, The Brown Decades (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1931), p. 115.

11

Van Rensselaer, op. cit., p. 8.

12

Ibid., p. 47.

and never had to look for work again. Commissions came faster than he could fill them; and with each new one, it seemed as if the architect grew with the building, attacking each new problem with originality and energy.¹³ While working on the Western Railroad Offices in Springfield (1867-1869), he began Grace Episcopal Church, West Medford (1867-1869), the North Congregational Church, Springfield (1868-1873), the Worcester High School (1869-1871), and the Agawam Bank, Springfield (1869-1870).

His next important buildings were the Brattle Square Church in Boston, a commission which he won in competition in July 1870,¹⁴ and the Buffalo State Hospital in the same year. The interest aroused in the Brattle Square Church paved the way for his most famous work, Trinity Church, also in Boston. He won the commission for it in July 1872, and the completed building was consecrated on February 9, 1877.¹⁵ The importance of its site, the prominence of its pastor, the Reverend Phillips Brooks, the interest excited by the competition for the choice of the architect, the collaboration of so eminent an artist as John La Farge, whom Richardson invited to paint the murals,¹⁶ all combined to focus attention on the imposing structure so admirably suited to its location in Copley Square.

Trinity was a great success from many viewpoints. It made Richardson famous.¹⁷ From henceforth his influence would dominate American architecture until his death. In addition, the building of so ambitious an edifice gave him still another opportunity to grow. The finished church is so different from his original design that he wondered why, if the patrons liked the final product, they had ever accepted the first plan. Mrs. van Rensselaer says:

¹³

Mumford, The South in Architecture, p. 93.

¹⁴

Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Jr., Modern Architecture (New York: Payson & Clarke Ltd., 1929), p. 105.

¹⁵

Van Rensselaer, op. cit., p. 20.

¹⁶

Tallmadge, op. cit., p. 174.

¹⁷

Montgomery Schuyler, "The Romanesque Revival in New York," The Architectural Record, I (July-Sept., 1891), 15.

Trinity grew to be a far finer building than the designs had promised, and it did more for Richardson than even he himself could have hoped. Not only was it a turning-point in his outer professional career,—it is also the most conspicuous milestone which marks the course of his inner artistic development. . . . When he began Trinity all his work had been merely tentative, and it was itself but a great and bold experiment. When he finished it he was already erecting other buildings which are mature and characteristic expressions of his power.¹⁸

By now, Richardson had found himself. In the same year that saw the completion of Trinity he began the first two of a series of small town libraries,¹⁹ those at Woburn (1877) and North Easton, Massachusetts (1877), respectively. Several others were to follow. He finished the Woburn Library in 1878, the North Easton structure in 1879, and in 1880 he began the Crane Memorial Library at Quincy, which²⁰ has been acclaimed as his masterpiece among libraries. Each is a distinct improvement²¹ over its predecessor; each one takes a long step forward toward simplification.

Richardson, now in his forty-third year, had reached full maturity in his architectural outlook. Gradually he began to concentrate more on the functional aspects of his buildings. The ornament became simpler and the forms more compact. Although he had established in the Woburn Library a pattern that he would follow in each succeeding one, in the later ones "it is as if he took this design and moulded it together, reducing the individuality of the separate parts, solidifying the whole. . . ."²²

But churches and libraries were only part of his amazing output during the last ten years of his life. In 1876 he was entrusted, along with Leopold Eidlitz and Frederick Law Olmsted, with the unification and completion of the State Capitol at Albany.²³ In 1878 he designed Sever Hall, his first commission from his Alma

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Van Rensselaer, op. cit., p. 20.

¹⁹

Montgomery Schuyler, "The Romanesque Revival in America," The Architectural Record, I (Oct.-Dec., 1891), 161.

²⁰

Ibid.; also Hitchcock, H. H. Richardson, p. 210.

²¹

Schuyler, "The Romanesque Revival in America," 161.

²²

Hitchcock, H. H. Richardson, p. 173.

²³

Van Rensselaer, op. cit., pp. 20-21.

Mater. In 1880 he began to build the Albany City Hall,²⁴ and the Fenway Bridges in Boston. He returned to Harvard in 1881 to erect Austin Hall. Suburban railroad stations began to rise under his direction, each an individual creation bearing the stamp of his spirit. And all the while he was erecting a series of country houses which, in Mumford's opinion, "not merely deserve to rank with the very best of his work: they were the best examples of an entirely native architecture that America²⁵ could show before 1900."

Richardson had by now only three more years to live. Into them he crowded his usual amount of strenuous work and hearty enjoyment. In 1882 he went to Europe for a rest, but travelled about at such a pace that he came home little benefited. Bad health and an ever growing number of commissions led to the surrender of much of his work to his staff of devoted but less gifted workers. Consequently, deteriora-²⁶ tion in the quality of some of his later buildings was the inevitable result. But his greatest works, those for which he hoped to be remembered, he reserved for him-²⁷ self. These he followed from beginning to end, or else until his own death. And posterity has confirmed his judgment of them. It is because of such achievements as the Pittsburgh Courthouse and Jail, the Marshall Field Building, the Glessner House, and the Pray Building that he is now remembered as one of America's greatest architects.

Richardson began the Pittsburgh Jail in 1884, the Glessner House and the Marshall Field Building in 1885, and the Pray Building only a few months before his²⁸ death. The different functions of these various buildings display the apparently limitless resources of a man who could continue, even on the brink of eternity, to

²⁴

Hitchcock, H. H. Richardson, p. 215.

²⁵

Mumford, The South in Architecture, p. 104.

²⁶

Hitchcock, H. H. Richardson, p. 249.

²⁷

Van Rensselaer, op. cit., p. 36.

²⁸

Hitchcock, H. H. Richardson, pp. 258, 273, 283.

plan with enthusiasm, to build with confidence, and to meet emergencies with the
 29 buoyancy of youth.

He lived to see the Pittsburgh Jail completed, and finished the drawings
 for the courthouse. There were other unfinished projects that he had to leave, and
 30 the possibilities of many more that he had not even begun. He died on April 27,
 1886, a few weeks after he had been elected an Honorary and Corresponding Member of
 31 the Royal Institute of British Architects. His funeral services were observed,
 32 most fittingly, in Trinity Church, with Phillips Brooks as the preacher. Mrs. van
 Rensselaer records the national recognition of his death, and considers such public
 interest in one who had been a great architect only, and not a public figure in any
 33 other sense, as "surprising enough to mark the dawn of a new day for art."

29

Van Rensselaer, op. cit., p. 112.

30

Mumford, The Brown Decades, p. 118.

31

Tallmadge, op. cit., p. 176.

32

Ibid.

33

Van Rensselaer, op. cit., p. 36.

CHAPTER III

ANALYSIS OF RICHARDSON'S DEVELOPMENT

The whole career of Richardson was a phenomenal success. The economic expansion, the dearth of well-trained architects, and his own expansive and winning personality were all to his advantage. But where he succeeded in a favorable environment, others have often failed. Montgomery Schuyler speaks of his "great and merited success" in the following manner:

It was due to his faculty of reducing a complicated problem to its simplest and most forcible expression. More specifically, it was due to his faculty for seizing some feature of his building, developing it into predominance, and skilfully subordinating the rest of his composition to it, until this feature became the building. It was his power of disposing masses, his insistence upon largeness and simplicity, his impatience of niggling, his straightforward and virile handling of his tasks, that made his successes brilliant, and even his failures interesting.¹

These were characteristics that Richardson manifested even from the very beginning of his development. Yet he did have to develop, even though the winning of his first commission in competition with well-established older men suggests that at the very outset he had more to give than others. His first commission, the Church of the Unity in Springfield, Massachusetts, was an achievement of importance, not because it was particularly remarkable as a building, but because it was a big assignment for a beginner. (Figs. 12, 13.) His Paris training had not prepared him to work in English Gothic, the prevailing mode in America at the time. He had had no period of apprenticeship which would have familiarized him with American methods of construction and business customs, and would have given him some notion about local materials.² His ability to cope with the practical difficulties attendant upon the successful execution of the task was, therefore, noteworthy.

¹

Montgomery Schuyler, American Architecture (New York: Harper & Bros., 1892), p. 153.

²

Van Rensselaer, op. cit., p. 47.



Fig.12



Fig.13

Two Views of the Church of the Unity, Springfield, Massachusetts

The Springfield Church is English Gothic in feeling, with a projecting porch, pointed windows, and a tower with a tall spire. Mrs. van Rensselaer considers it "entirely satisfactory as a composition" and praises its general conception and arrangement.³ Horace Townsend, writing in 1894, displays an Englishman's fine scorn for American culture when he says of it:

. . . it is curiously suggestive of the low level to which ecclesiastical architecture in America had as yet remained (I will not say sunk, for it was never high) that this piece of work should have been sufficiently admired to have laid the foundation of the designer's fortunes. Truth to tell, it is a feeble reminiscence of English Gothic, which, though pleasing in its grouping, is painfully inadequate in detail, and bald as to its interior.⁴

But he is willing to praise what is good and points out in the same article Richardson's originality and strong personality, his freedom from French influence, and his feeling for the effects of material.

When one considers that Mr. Townsend had probably seen some of the finest examples of medieval English churches, his criticism does not seem too severe. But in comparison with contemporary American pseudo-Gothic buildings, Richardson's work fares much better. It has a pleasing solidity, which together with its rugged and squat forms, already points to the direction in which he will develop.

In his next church at West Medford, Massachusetts (Fig. 14), begun in 1867, his bold and undisguised use of local boulders in the walls (Figs. 15, 16) showed Richardson's readiness to experiment with new materials. He was not the first to use such boulders, and did so, it is said, at the suggestion of a benefactor of the church. But his successful handling of the problem of textures marks him out as a creative and original architect. Not until the beginning of the twentieth century did architects again adapt themselves to local materials and needs with such flexibility as Richardson exhibited in 1867.

Before beginning the Medford Church, Richardson was commissioned to design

3

Ibid., pp. 47-49.

4

Horace Townsend, "H. H. Richardson, Architect," The Magazine of Art, XVII (1894), 134-135.



Fig. 14
Grace Episcopal Church
Medford, Massachusetts



Fig. 15
Grace Episcopal Church.
Detail showing stonework



Fig. 16
Grace Episcopal Church
Detail showing stonework



the Western Railroad Offices in Springfield. As it appeared in an old photograph,⁵ it was a most un-Richardsonian building. A smooth, gray granite block with a mansard roof, it was apparently an attempt at French Renaissance, which in American eyes was then synonymous with modern progressiveness.⁶ Another commercial building of his early years was the Agawam Bank, also in Springfield, commissioned in 1869. The uncertain handling exhibited in both this and in the Worcester High School, begun the same year, betrays the youth and inexperience of the architect. But to the untutored public of his day, they were acceptable, and he suffered no loss of popularity.⁷

The third church built by Richardson, the North Congregational in Springfield,⁸ was commissioned in 1868 but not built until 1872-73. It seems unnecessary to consider it here, since it was during these intervening years that Richardson emerged from his preparatory period, and in the erection of another church made his first significant contribution to American architecture.

Richardson's fourth church, Brattle Square in Boston (Figs. 17, 18), was a very important one for him from every viewpoint, despite the fact that it is not a very large building. It is cruciform, with a tower which rises above the angle between the nave and transept. Its round arched windows, arcaded portico, and the crudeness of the carved capitals and mouldings, won it the label "Romanesque." The exterior is of yellowish gray Roxbury Puddingstone, with some yellow and brownstone accents. A gilded frieze of trumpeting angels close to the top of the tower provides a note of richness and the reason for the popular title, "Church of the Holy Beanblowers."⁹ But none of these details, nor all of them together, explain the

⁵ Hitchcock, H. H. Richardson, Fig. 10.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 70-74.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 85-92.

⁸ Ibid., p. 83.

⁹ Tallmadge, op. cit., p. 172.



Fig.17

Two Views of
Brattle Square Church, Boston



Fig.18

importance of the Brattle Square Church. It lies rather in the fact that Richardson's personal style first began to emerge in this building. In it his emphasis on fundamentals is evident; the proportions of exterior masses and their relations to interior space and the restraint in the necessary breaking up of the main surfaces are what principally concern him. Here the exterior mass encloses the interior space simply and clearly and the high walls are unbroken by unnecessary buttresses or other projections. There is ample variety in color and texture, yet the plainness of the large expanses of wall space is more attractive than the cluttered ornamentation of nearby Victorian Gothic churches.¹¹

Mrs. van Rensselaer, writing in 1888, naturally could not know what would happen to architecture in the twentieth century, nor how far in advance of his contemporaries Richardson was in his treatment of this building. She appraised it, therefore, only for the relations of the different parts to one another and to the whole, and not from the point of view of its future influence. She says:

No part of it is very interesting except the tower, and though this is in itself superb it has little organic relation to the lower masses and crushes them by its excessive size and stateliness. Its chief intrinsic beauty is its chief defect as a feature in such a composition. I mean its magnificent independence-- the way it rises in a single spring from its own sturdy feet. Disdaining the support of the adjacent walls it deprives them of dignity, and would itself appear to better advantage if they did not exist,-- if it stood in actual as it does in virtual independence.¹²

Mrs. van Rensselaer was a very discerning critic and, as usual, her criticism is a just one as seen from her point of view. It is true that the tower dominates the lower portion of the church. Nevertheless, viewed from our perspective sixty years later, the more subtle relationships mentioned already compensate greatly for this fault, obvious though it is. Henry-Russell Hitchcock is loud in his praise of this structure, and points out that Richardson exhibited here, in 1870, the same characteristics for which Hendrik Berlage, in his Amsterdam Stock Exchange (1898-

¹⁰

Hitchcock, H. H. Richardson, p. 181.

¹¹

Ibid., p. 114.

¹²

Van Rensselaer, op. cit., p. 52.

1903), was hailed as one of the earliest architects of the New Tradition.¹³ Giedion, in an interesting comparison of Berlage and Richardson, sums up their common characteristics:

Berlage and Richardson both tend toward simplified Romanesque forms, forms which from the time of their inception have been bound up with the treatment of the wall as a flat surface. . . .

. . . The new aims derived from their study of Romanesque buildings, and not the fact that Berlage and Richardson used somewhat Romanesque shapes, are what matter. The time was not ripe for the outright inventions of new forms derived from a new space conception, and they turned--very naturally--to history for help. Romanesque methods started them on the way toward the new forms their own period still awaited.¹⁴

In their choice of the basic, massive forms of Romanesque, both men showed their affinity with the great architects of every age. By building with strong, simple masses of masonry, they laid the foundations for the twentieth century workers in ferro-concrete, glass blocks, and steel girders as surely as if they themselves had used them.

Like the Brattle Square Church, Trinity is Romanesque in character, but more ambitious than its predecessor (Fig. 19). The nave is longer; low, square towers, now elaborately capped in imitation of the crossing tower, flank the facade. (Figs. 20, 21.) Over the crossing is a large square lantern surmounted by a tower modelled after that of the Cathedral of Salamanca (Fig. 20).¹⁵ The imposing porch (Figs. 22, 23), familiar to all who know Trinity, was added after Richardson's death. It is, however, in all probability, approximately what he intended to do. An early photograph, taken before the porch was added, shows the boldness and simplicity of the design better than does the present exterior.

Lewis Mumford, who considers the first ten years of Richardson's career as a period of preparation, ranks Trinity as his most important achievement before

¹³ Hitchcock, Modern Architecture, p. 105.

¹⁴ Giedion, op. cit., pp. 235-237.

¹⁵ Hitchcock, H. H. Richardson, pp. 137, 139.



Fig.19
Trinity Church, Boston

1872-1877

Fig.20

Details of the
Towers of Trinity
Church, Boston



Fig.21



Fig.22

Detail of Sculpture of the Porch of Trinity Church, Boston



Fig.23

Detail of Porch of Trinity Church

1880.¹⁶ Royal Cortissoz, of whom Mumford remarks that he managed to say about as
 17
 many stupid things about Richardson as he could in a small space, writes:

There is a great building lying about in it, a masterpiece struggling to be born. The huge central tower, so strongly reminiscent of Salamanca, would alone challenge interest and admiration. Perhaps it is in its too proud predominance that we have a clue to Richardson's predestined failure as a lasting influence; it marks him the creator of the fine episode rather than of the organic, full-rounded great design.¹⁸

It is interesting that Mr. Cortissoz, writing at a time when eclecticism was not only accepted, but even admired, should single out for praise the one feature that was least Richardson's. The central tower was largely designed by Stanford White, the brilliant young artist recently come to Richardson's office, whose flare for imitation would one day undo so much that Richardson had tried to establish.

As for the structural soundness of the building, the architect's "power to conceive a building as a whole, and to preserve the integrity of his conception no
 19
 matter how various might be the features or how profuse the decoration he employed,"
 apparently they were not grasped by Mr. Cortissoz any more than they were by Richardson's contemporaries. The tower that was so obviously a copy of the tower of Salamanca, the round arches, colonettes, and rock-faced stone, were so many badges of southern Romanesque style. Some architects probed no further, and for several
 20
 years copies of Trinity sprang up wherever new churches were built. "Richardsonian Romanesque" became an established fact and, as is the case with Wright today, the admiration of many of his less gifted imitators helped to obscure rather than to further the principles upon which Richardson himself continued to develop.

In view of the differences of opinion expressed by various writers on the merits of Trinity, it is interesting to see how an earlier critic appraises it:

16

Lewis Mumford, The Brown Decades, p. 116.

17

Ibid., p. 124.

18

Royal Cortissoz, Art and Common Sense (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), p. 386.

19

Van Rensselaer, op. cit., p. 112.

20

Hitchcock, H. H. Richardson, p. 145.

. . . it is, perhaps, his best known production on the one hand, while on the other it exhibits in a marked degree both the excellences and the demerits which were to prevail in his future performances. We have the impressionistic insistence on a single feature--generally the single-centre arch--but in this case the wonderful tower, which in all lights and from all points of view is equally pleasing, the skill in grouping, and the reticence which never allows an approach to vulgarity, while we have also the tameness of detail, . . . the concealment, as to the interior, of the lines of construction, and in especial the want of that mystery, which in work of the highest genius allows one exquisite feature after another to grow into view, . . . One sees Richardson's work, and understands his meaning at a glance, here as elsewhere.²¹

It seems that Mr. Townsend, in 1894, succeeded in laying his finger on a most important point, simply this, that in spite of his success, Richardson was not meant to be a designer of churches. It was part of his genius that he should be understood at a glance. Clarity, not mystery, was to become one of his essential characteristics. He needed to build, not churches, but the type of structure he most longed to do. He once said, "The things I want most to design are a grain-elevator and the interior of a great river-steamboat."²² Traditional "styles", historically associated with religious structures, were the only acceptable ones for churches until long after Richardson's day. His interests, therefore, were now directed to other fields, in which experimentation with new forms would be welcomed. Two of the types most suited to him were the small town library and the suburban railroad station. In neither of these was he committed by custom, as was the case with churches, to the use of historical styles. Mumford believes that it was this²³ need for a new type of building which set free the creative genius of Richardson. He designed several small libraries and a series of railroad stations within a brief span of years. They were so many stepping stones to his final expression in the buildings for which he is now most famous.

The libraries followed one another in quick succession. The first, at Woburn (Fig. 24), is, in the opinion of H. R. Hitchcock, almost as important as the

²¹

Horace Townsend, op. cit., p. 136.

²²

Van Rensselaer, op. cit., p. 22.

²³

Mumford, The South in Architecture, p. 95.



Fig.24
Winn Memorial Library, Woburn, Mass., 1877. View from front



Fig.25
Winn Memorial Library, Woburn, Mass. View from rear.

Brattle Square Church in Richardson's creative development.²⁴ It represents the assimilation and translation into new forms of the diverse influences that had been brought to bear upon him. All that the French had taught him about planning, all the boldness he had acquired from the English, were now expressed in his own personal idiom.²⁵ It is true, however, that the Woburn Library has many faults. It is not functional according to twentieth century standards. Its present librarian admits that it is spacious, but at the same time lacks room for additional shelving, and that the lighting is poor. Yet even today its beauty of design and ornament is still considered outstanding. Although the polychromy contrasts too strongly with the rough stone surface, the texture of the latter is rich and pleasing. The tower and the octagonal museum compete for notice (Fig. 25), yet each in itself is happily conceived.²⁶ The stack wing already begins to prophesy what Richardson will one day become. It is simple and poised, and respect for its function determines its balanced and original composition.²⁷ (Fig. 26.)

The North Easton Library, begun soon after Woburn, corrected almost all the weaknesses of the latter. Its massing is simpler, the tower much less conspicuous.²⁸ Richardson was already learning the value of a continuous surface for obtaining the effect of rugged mass.²⁹ Here, as in Woburn, the row of windows in the stack wing is the finest feature in the building.³⁰

The Crane Memorial Library at Quincy, completed in 1883, exhibits such simplicity as would amount to baldness, in the opinion of Montgomery Schuyler,³¹

²⁴ Hitchcock, H. H. Richardson, p. 172.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 185.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 188.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 173, 186.

³¹ Schuyler, "The Romanesque Revival in America," 161.



Fig.26
Woburn Library

View from rear, showing stack room

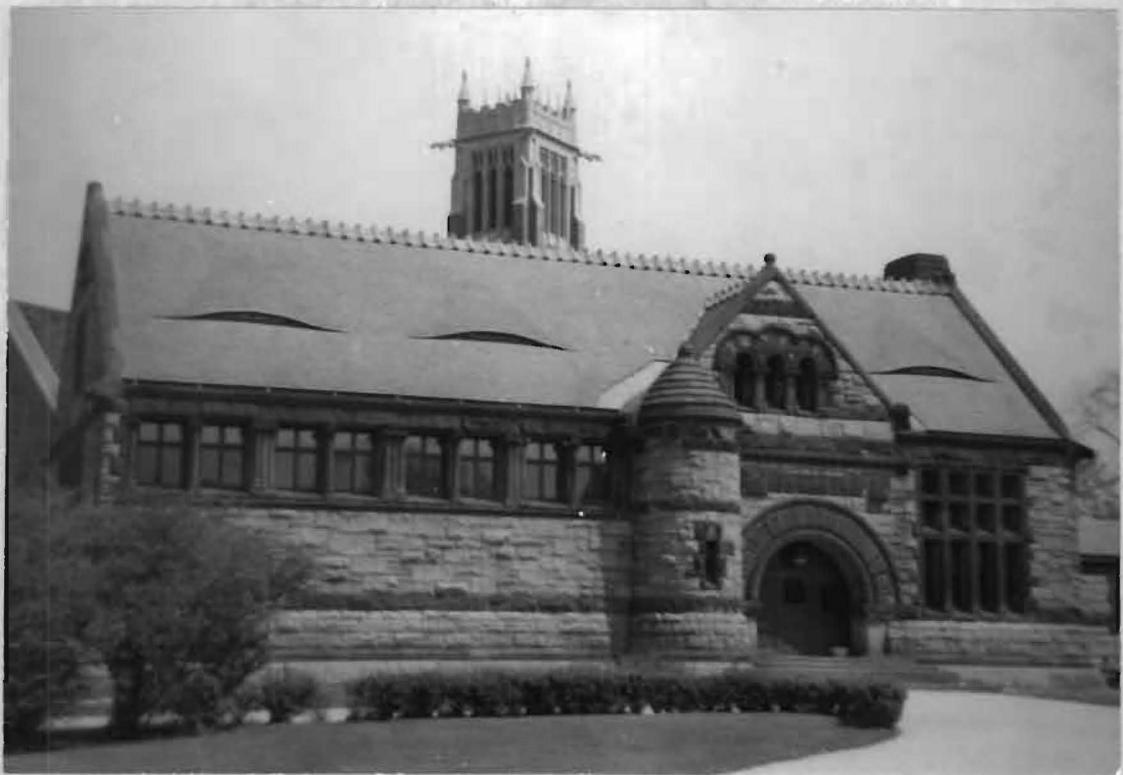


Fig.27
Crane Memorial Library, Quincy, Massachusetts, 1880-1883

were it not for the fine balance shown in the interplay of the three features of the front, the reading room, the bookroom and the entrance. It forms a long, low mass with a silhouette unbroken by the gable which fits snugly over the entrance. The stair turret is compact and practical. The band of stack room windows running from turret to corner terminates in a rather modern fashion, with only the thick-³²ness of the end wall beyond the windows (Fig. 27).

After completing the Crane Library, Richardson erected the Billings Memorial Library for the University of Vermont and the Converse Memorial Library, in Malden, Massachusetts. Neither surpasses the Quincy Library, nor adds anything new in his development. As for the State Capitol in Albany, upon which he worked in collaboration with others, and with many obstacles to overcome, it is hardly a work for which he deserves to be judged unfavorably, while there is little in the confused mixture of Renaissance and Romanesque styles that one can praise.

Another building, the design of which imposed restrictions on the architect, but for another reason than those governing the Albany Capitol, was Sever Hall at Harvard (Fig. 28). This was a commission entirely to his liking. It was an honor for any son of Harvard to be so chosen, and the restrictions imposed by the task constituted a challenge to his taste and ingenuity. He had the problem of designing a new building that would blend with its venerable eighteenth century neighbors in the Harvard Yard, and he solved it in a manner that would be difficult to surpass. He kept the best of the old, that is, the fine brickwork, the symmetry³³ and the dignified proportions, but he borrowed little from Colonial ornament. The result was, in Hitchcock's opinion, one of Richardson's greatest achievements. Sever harmonizes with the old and yet creates a new style for a new day. It is the³⁴ building in which Richardson attained complete maturity. In it he made a definite

³²
Hitchcock, H. H. Richardson, p. 210.

³³
Ibid., p. 189.

³⁴
Ibid., p. 188.



Fig.28

Sever Hall, Harvard, 1878-1880

Main Facade



Fig.29

Austin Hall, Harvard, 1861-1863

break with the "romantic" past and discarded its formulas. He showed that he now understood the architect's duty to look to the future instead of bemoaning the loss of the beauties of the past. His only concessions to romanticism are the low Syrian doorway and the medieval-looking tower roofs above the circular bay windows. These do not harmonize as well with the character of the building as does the rear entrance with its simple doorway and pediment.

The plan, which is simple and functional in its arrangement of rooms and corridors, is frankly expressed on the exterior. The unbroken regular rectangular mass, designed only one year after the Woburn Library, demonstrates with what rapid strides the architect was learning to strip off unessentials. This is evident also in Austin Hall (1881-83), built for the Law School. With the exception of the deeply recessed doorway and the colonettes and pilasters between the windows, Austin is a simple and straightforward building, which, like Sever, is in perfect accord with its eighteenth century surroundings (Fig. 29).

The Albany City Hall (Fig. 30), also of this period (1880-1882), is one of Richardson's most Romanesque buildings. Yet, in his treatment of the side windows, which are so grouped in threes as to suggest the emphasis on openness that became possible in metal construction in later years (Fig. 31), he exhibits that forward-looking attitude so frequently found in his best work of this creative period.

The series of stations which he did for the Boston and Albany Railroad were, despite their modest purpose, outstanding examples of Richardson's break with romanticism. They stand simple and free, never pretending to be more important than

35

Mumford, The South in Architecture, p. 93.

36

Hitchcock, H. H. Richardson, p. 190.

37

Ibid., p. 191.

38

Ibid., p. 190.

39

Hitchcock believes that Richardson's draftsmen were responsible for the incongruous Romanesque decorative notes (possibly while Richardson was in Europe).

40

Ibid., p. 216.



Fig.30

Albany City Hall

Fig.31
Albany City Hall (Detail showing fenestration.)

41

Walter Gutz Ehrhardt, *Modern*

42

Hitchcock, H. H. Richardson

43

Ibid., p. 226.

44

Ibid., p. 278.

45

Charles Moore, *The Life and Times of Stephen Field*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1929, p. 41.

they are--temporary shelters for travellers, needing only to spread low, protecting roofs over a hurrying crowd, or to provide comfortable waiting rooms and ticket offices.⁴¹ The first one, at Auburndale, Massachusetts, commissioned in 1881, is already a complete solution of the problem. A plain, unadorned, architectural statement, it charms by its calm logic. It is a long, low rectangle of granite, with darker trim about the windows and doors (Fig. 32). The roof, once of red tile, extends out over the platform in both directions, and also projects to form a carriage porch at one corner (Fig. 33). All the supports for the roof of the platform⁴² and of the carriage porch are square wooden posts, spreading out at the top (Figs. 34, 35).

The Chestnut Hill Station dates from 1883, and is also quite pleasing in its simplicity. Its carriage porch is formed by means of two low arches built into the extended side walls of the structure, and the roof also is unbroken, sweeping⁴³ down over the porch without interruption (Fig. 36). The later and more ambitious New London station (Figs. 37, 38), finished after Richardson's death, is in some ways the finest of all. The main façade resembles that of Sever Hall although it is appropriately more austere than Sever. The low, broad dormers in the roof are also similar to those of Sever. The one unconvincing note is the slight projection of⁴⁴ the upper story, which seems to serve no particular purpose. The total effect is less picturesque than in his smaller suburban stations, but more suited to the needs of a large city.

During the seventies, McKim and Mead had begun the triumvirate which Stanford White completed in 1879, having first spent, like McKim, a short period working⁴⁵

⁴¹

Walter Curt Behrendt, Modern Building (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1937), p. 110.

⁴²

Hitchcock, H. H. Richardson, p. 224.

⁴³

Ibid., p. 226.

⁴⁴

Ibid., p. 278.

⁴⁵

Charles Moore, The Life and Times of Charles Follen McKim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1929), p. 41.



Fig.32

Railroad Station, Auburndale, Massachusetts, 1881.



Fig.33

Auburndale Station, showing porte cochere.

**Fig.34****Fig.35**

Two views of Auburndale Railroad Station from track side



Fig.36
Railroad Station, Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts



Fig.37



Fig.38

Two Views of Railroad Station, New London, Connecticut

for Richardson. In the early eighties the young firm erected an impressive number of buildings (Figs. 40, 41), and eventually became his greatest rivals. But Richardson's preeminence secured him as many commissions as he was willing to accept, and this crowded period boasts a whole series of his frame dwellings and cottages, usually, although not always, erected for the wealthy. They are not all good.⁴⁶

His flair for the monumental and the massive sometimes induced him to sacrifice the intimacy and gentleness so desirable in a home. But his best, by their originality and charming use of color and materials, mark him as the most gifted forerunner, in this field, of Frank Lloyd Wright.⁴⁷ (Fig. 39) Richardson took the elements of the traditional seventeenth century white farmhouse and transformed it into a wide-windowed cottage, with a hospitable porch, and freely disposed open rooms.⁴⁸ The low-flung character, the window arrangement, with due consideration for the view, and the emphasis on suitability to living rather than exterior effect justify Mumford's claim that in the frame house Richardson attained

. . . a pitch of esthetic excellence which makes it one of the outstanding achievements in our whole architecture: even the colors he introduced, weathered browns, autumnal reds, and sage greens, brought it into harmony with the New England landscape.⁴⁹

His interest in natural surroundings is now being carried to its ultimate development by Wright. The obvious example is Falling Water at Bear Run, Pennsylvania (1936), in which his sense of the dramatic is given its finest expression. Lesser masterpieces which deserve to be better known are the Sidney Bazett House, Hillsborough, California (1940), the John Pew House near Madison, Wisconsin (1940) and the Lloyd Lewis House, Libertyville, Illinois (1940).⁵⁰ All exhibit those qualities which were interpreted so differently in the Richardsonian idiom, but spring

46

Schuyler, American Architecture, p. 155.

47

Mumford, The Brown Decades, p. 51.

48

Mumford, The South in Architecture, p. 102.

49

Ibid., pp. 102-103.

50

Henry-Russell Hitchcock, In the Nature of Materials (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1942), passim.



Fig.39

Wm. Wette Sherman House Newport, R.I.
H.H. Richardson, 1874-1876



Fig.40

Samuel Tilton House, Newport, R.I.
McKim, Mead and White, 1882



Fig.41

Newport Casino McKim, Mead and White
1881

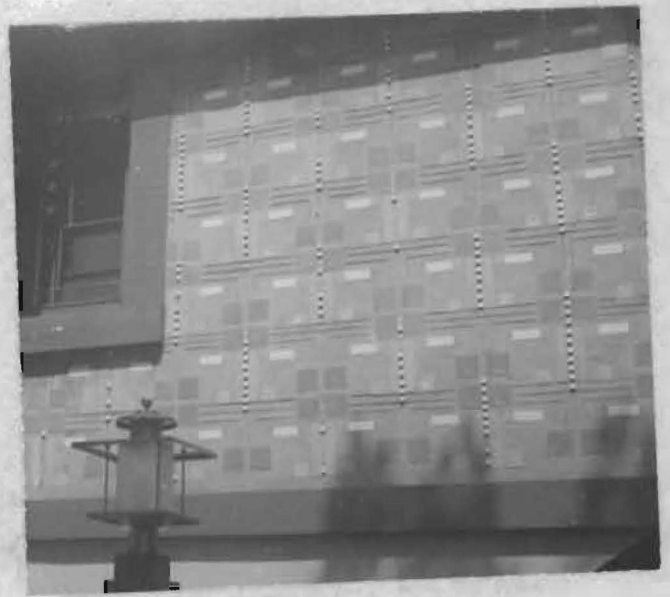


Fig.42

Detail of plaster and tile ornament,
Avery Coonley House, Riverside, Ill.
Frank Lloyd Wright, 1908

from the same principle. Both men utilized the natural setting. Both introduced variety of texture and richness of effect by the logical use of the building materials themselves. And though both are best remembered for the structures that cost most, each delighted to exercise his ingenuity in overcoming financial restrictions when he had to.

One of Richardson's most successful examples is the Marion Cottage, built in 1881 for Reverend Percy Brown at Marion, Massachusetts. It is a simple frame structure, quite small, covered with natural gray shingles, and with dark green trim. An adaptation of the eighteenth century farmhouse, it has a gambrel roof and several dormers, small paned windows and comfortable porches. There is no ornament except the sawtooth edges of the shingles around the windows.

A more sophisticated sense of functional ornament, in keeping with the complexities of modern life, is demonstrated by Frank Lloyd Wright. In the first decade of the century he experimented successfully with combinations of inset colored tiles and continuous incised lines in plaster. The Avery Coonley House, Riverside, Illinois (1908) is a handsome example (Fig. 42). In the twenties his California perforated textile blocks, though perhaps too extreme for some conservatives, introduced richly textured surfaces in keeping with their luxurious California settings.

The Marion Cottage was probably Richardson's most inexpensive commission, costing only \$2,500, but Hitchcock appraises it as establishing Richardson's claim to greatness far better than does Trinity Church, maintaining that it was far more significant "to have set a sound model for the domestic vernacular than for more monumental buildings." By the same token, Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian houses

51

Hitchcock, H. H. Richardson, p. 222.

52

Ibid.

53

Hitchcock, In the Nature of Materials, Figures 148-153, 249-262.

54

Hitchcock, H. H. Richardson, p. 222.

55

Ibid., p. 223.

have a greater significance in the history of domestic architecture than some of the more sumptuous homes for which he is better known. The Usonian houses include, besides sound building and low cost, the invaluable asset of a new and fresh point of view. In contrast to the deadening effect of stereotyped rows of identical boxes so often found in inexpensive housing developments, they give every opportunity for the expression of individuality and imagination.

Of Richardson's larger frame houses, the Stoughton House at Cambridge (1882) is judged by Hitchcock as possibly "the best suburban wooden house in America, . . . comparable only to the finest of Frank Lloyd Wright's." It is L-shaped, with a circular projection containing the stairwell, the roundness of which makes a pleasing contrast on the outside and is effective on the interior as well. The shorter end of the L contains the drawing room and library, with bedrooms above. The longer end is pleasingly broken up on the exterior with a two-storied loggia.

The Paine House in Waltham, Massachusetts (Figs. 43, 44, 45), together with the Potter House in St. Louis, is singled out by Behrendt as typically American, probably because their most characteristic features are a natural outgrowth of their environment. It was commissioned in 1884 and for the most part constructed after Richardson's death. It is, however, a truly Richardsonian structure, although his original plans were much modified before it was completed. The exterior exhibits a bold combination of boulders in the circular towers and shingles on the main house which, from the garden front of the house, is pleasingly picturesque. The interior has as its chief feature a great hall extending the full width of the house, enriched on one side by an onyx-faced fireplace. Diagonally across from it is a handsome

56

Ibid., p. 233.

57

Ibid.

58

Behrendt, op. cit., p. 111.

59

Hitchcock, H. H. Richardson, pp. 267-268.

60

Ibid., p. 269.



Fig. 43
Detail of Paine House, Waltham, Massachusetts



Fig. 44
Detail of Paine House



Fig. 45
Detail of Paine House



Fig. 46
Photo. H. R. Hitchcock, Jr.
The Ames Gate Lodge, North Easton, Mass.
View from the road

staircase.⁶¹

Within the last ten years the work of two brothers, Charles and Henry Greene of Pasadena, has been reappraised, and belated acclaim given to them. They worked mostly in California in the two decades preceding the First World War, and confined themselves chiefly to creating houses suited to the climate, the terrain,⁶² and the people of California. It is safe to say that no one after Richardson exploited the possibilities of wood construction more tastefully and originally than Greene and Greene. Is it merely a coincidence that one of them, Henry, worked for two years for the firm that Richardson had founded?⁶³ Like Richardson, Greene and Greene treated wood according to its nature, never forcing it into shapes that⁶⁴ would be affected by sun or rain. A frank admission of the limitations of their materials is always evident in their handling. The broken line and segmental structure developed by them gave their buildings a new and original kind of ornament, of⁶⁵ which the exposed structure was an integral part. The Blacker and Gamble houses in Pasadena and the Thorsen house in Berkeley are typical examples of Greene and Greene's work, always "generous, natural and unashamed."⁶⁶ It is hardly probable that a philosophy of building and ornament so like Richardson's could have owed nothing to his influence.

No treatment, however cursory, of Richardson's domestic architecture can omit the Ames Gate Lodge (1880-81) (Fig. 46), and Gardener's Cottage (1884) at North Easton, Massachusetts. The former was built in 1880, one of the most productive years of Richardson's career, and illustrates most of the characteristics of

⁶¹

Ibid., p. 268.

⁶²

Jean Murray Bangs, "Greene and Greene," The Architectural Forum, LXXXIX (October, 1948), 82.

⁶³

Ibid.

⁶⁴

Ibid., p. 85.

⁶⁵

Ibid., pp. 85-86.

⁶⁶

Ibid., p. 86.

his mature genius.⁶⁷ It is so full of masculine vitality that one can imagine Richardson standing, like another Paul Bunyan, setting each great boulder and enormous voussoir in place with his own hands, exulting over the opportunity of expending his tremendous energies. It is not a very large building, but everything about it suggests the elemental forces of nature. The exterior is of boulders, large at the base, and gradually diminishing in size until they are as small as cobblestones when they reach the bright, red tile roof. The Syrian arch that forms the opening over the driveway has long, vari-colored voussoirs in perfect accord with the huge
⁶⁸
 boulders.

The house was intended to serve as a green house and an overflow guest house, in addition to its primary purpose as a gate lodge. It gave Richardson every opportunity to indulge his fancy, exercise his ingenuity, and get back to nature without any restrictions. The result was a thoroughly pleasing, highly original, yet compact and serviceable building. As one approaches it from the road, the lower wing containing the green house is to the left of the great arch over the roadway, and the higher and more complex wing is to the right. A series of small windows directly under the low roof of the left wing reminds one of the fenestration of Richardson's libraries. On the right, a great, craggy tower of boulders marks the position of the stairwell, and two rows of small windows leave the exterior fortress-
⁶⁹
 like in its comparatively unbroken mass.

Strange and almost fanciful though the building is, it still exhibits the best characteristics of Richardson's domestic style, expressed usually in his frame houses. The low but prominent roofs, the occasional rounded features breaking the exterior, the free asymmetrical arrangement, the inviting porches, the carefully placed series of windows and the dependence on natural textures as ornament, are all

⁶⁷

Hitchcock, H. H. Richardson, p. 202.

⁶⁸

Ibid., p. 203.

⁶⁹

Ibid., pp. 202-203.

conspicuous here. It is one of Richardson's finest contributions.⁷⁰

The Gardener's Cottage, erected three years later, is his smallest, but by
⁷¹
 no means his least important work. Hitchcock laments that it was not accepted as
⁷²
 the model for all future American suburban buildings. It is still most pleasing
⁷³
 to the twentieth century eye. A simple shingled house, quite regular in plan, it
 has a typical round projection giving interest to the exterior. The whole impres-
 sion is one of inviting comfort. Everything about it reveals the touch of a master
 who knows how to be simple and unpretentious without being ineffectual. For by
 1884, when he finished this cottage, Richardson had come a very long way, and one
 of the most conspicuous evidences of it was his attainment of simplicity. He had
 learned that brick and shingle could be their own ornament when used in accordance
⁷⁴
 with their natures, and had, for the most part, discarded all other ornament. He
 had acquired a greater freedom than any of his contemporaries in the handling of
 wooden houses, not only in the floor plans, but also in his original treatment of
⁷⁵
 fenestration. In designing such new problems as his railroad stations and small
 libraries, he had succeeded in analyzing and giving outward expression to the func-
⁷⁶
 tions of each.

His mature style was attained, not by the development of manners or man-
 nerisms easily identifiable as his, but by a process of seeking a logical and con-
⁷⁷
 sistent way of treating each new structure entrusted to him. He was ready now, in

⁷⁰

Ibid., p. 204.

⁷¹

Ibid., p. 272.

⁷²

Ibid.

⁷³

Ibid.

⁷⁴

Mumford, The South in Architecture, p. 104.

⁷⁵

Ibid.

⁷⁶

Ibid., p. 95.

⁷⁷

Ibid., p. 105.

the last two years that remained to him, to show his mastery in an example of each of three types of building in which he had already attained eminence--a monumental public group, the Pittsburgh Courthouse and Jail, a private dwelling, the Glessner House, and two commercial structures, the Marshall Field Wholesale Store in Chicago and the Pray Building in Boston.

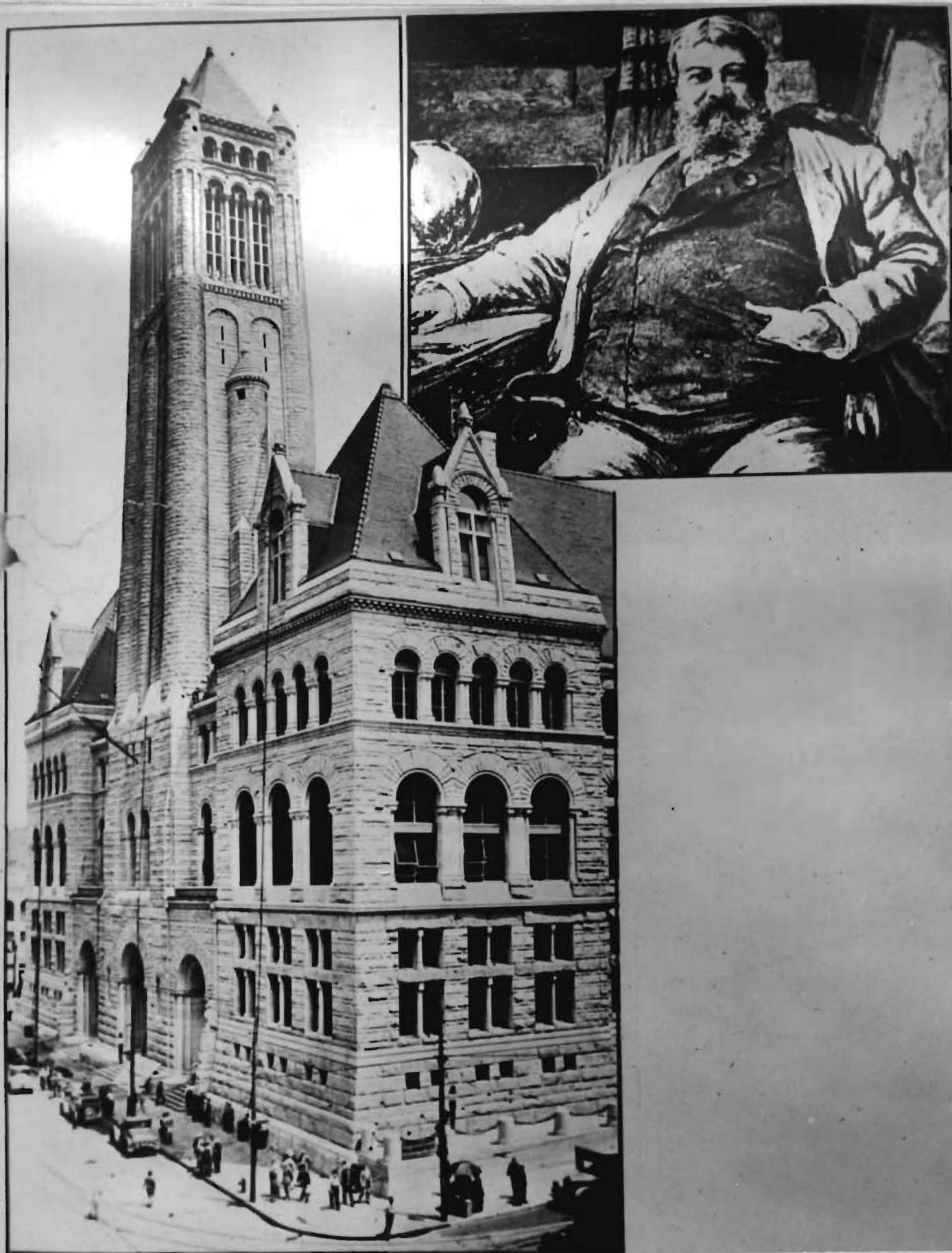


Fig.47

Pittsburgh Courthouse

Photo.Courtesy Pittsburgh Press.
Inset-H.H.Richardson

CHAPTER IV

LAST WORKS AND SUBSEQUENT INFLUENCE

As he continued to experiment, Richardson grew constantly surer of what he wanted, and more certain of the means he needed to employ. But he remained himself, and if it was his innate sense of virile building that made him prefer the massiveness of Romanesque forms, it was his romantic temperament that made him delight in Romanesque picturesqueness, however restrained, until the end of his life. In 1882 he had been to Europe and had journeyed down to Spain, where he saw for the first time the Salamanca tower that had served as his inspiration for the tower of Trinity Church. There too he saw massive Romanesque arches with voussairs eight¹ feet long that must have delighted him by their almost primitive strength. When, in 1884, he began to build the Allegheny County Buildings in Pittsburgh (Fig. 47), he found the opportunity to use such eight-foot voussairs in the granite arches of² the jail, an immense pile, perfectly suited to units of so great a size. Indeed, it would seem at first sight as if in one of the most important commissions of his life, and only two years before his death, he had renounced all the hard-won simplicity and functionalism so brilliantly displayed in railroad stations, libraries and even in some public buildings, and reverted to the romantic trappings of his earlier days. Undeniably, the towers, turrets and gabled dormers in these buildings seem a far cry from the austerity of Sever Hall or the Crane Library. But in Richardson's own report to the county commissioners it is easy to see that here there is no retrogression. On the contrary, it is an expression of functionalism in architecture, all the more noteworthy when one considers the date, 1884. It reads in part:

¹ Hitchcock, H. H. Richardson, p. 259.

² Ibid.

The Plan of the building is strictly utilitarian, the aim being to obtain the greatest practicable advantages for its distinctive purposes that can be had within reasonable limits of outlay. In considering what is reasonable in this respect the structure has been regarded as one of permanent character....

As to light, the object has been to overcome local disadvantages by making as large window spaces as shall be consistent with due strength of walls, and by resorting to special expedients of which the result will be that the court rooms and all the principal offices receive floods of light from two sides, while not a single room in the building lacks direct light through the outer walls in excess of ordinary rules.

With regard to air, an abundant supply is to be drawn from an elevation at which it will be free from the heavier gases, and this supply is to be screened and purified before it is thrown into the working departments. [The ventilators are concealed in the romantic-looking turrets already noted.]

Inevitably there comes to mind Frank Lloyd Wright's Larkin Building in Buffalo (1904) in which the architect solved the problem of fresh air in a smoky city in an equally resourceful but very different way. Windows are at a minimum, light enters through skylights above, and a system of air-conditioning controls⁴ ventilation.

A more spectacular example of Wright's ingenuity is the S. C. Johnson and Son Administration Building in Racine, Wisconsin, designed in 1936. Here, air is sucked into the air-conditioning unit. Heat radiates evenly from under the concrete floor, and is controlled to change with the sun. Light descends through a glass tubed roof. Columns nine inches in diameter at the base leave ample room for the furniture, but spread to a diameter of more than eighteen feet at the top. The exterior is composed of smooth flowing curves.⁵ It is at opposite poles from the heavy rectangular structure of Richardson in appearance, but in complete agreement in principle.

3

H. H. Richardson, Description of Drawings for the proposed New County Buildings for Allegheny County, Penn. (Boston: Printed for Private Circulation, 1884), p. 4.

4

Ray Faulkner, E. Ziegfeld, and G. Hill, Art Today, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1941), p. 29.

5

Ibid., pp. 110-11.

In the statement quoted, Richardson continues:

. . . the design has been to provide a building the character of which should depend on its outlines, on the massing and accentuation of the main features representing its leading purposes, and on the relation of the openings to the solid parts. . . . the intention has been to produce that sense of solidity requisite in dignified, monumental work, by. . . a perfectly quiet and massive treatment of the wall surfaces.⁶

He succeeded in realizing his aims. The massiveness suitable for public buildings, the solidity and dignity, are all obvious. What is less apparent is, for instance, the fine character of the fenestration in the courtyard of the courthouse, or the frankness with which the windows reveal the position of the staircases in the corner pavilions. A minor feature which Hitchcock singles out for special praise is the chimney shaft of the jail.

. . . in the nineteenth century, which built so many smokestacks, this is perhaps the only one whose beauty is intentional and really architectural in the fullest sense. This plain cylindrical shaft rising above the solid wall, with its curious angles in plan, is of an abstract quality hardly dreamed of by twentieth century architects. Yet it is absolutely material in its practical usefulness and its massive rock-faced granite.⁷

The Pittsburgh buildings were Richardson's last monumental public buildings. The Glessner House in Chicago was his last masterpiece in the field of domestic architecture (Fig. 48).⁸ As a general rule, his suburban frame houses are finer than his city dwellings. But the Glessner House is in a class apart, because of the original solution Richardson worked out to combat the disadvantages of noise and dirt.⁹ It is an E-shaped structure, with very few openings towards the street. Its granite walls are superior in workmanship even to the walls of the Pittsburgh buildings.¹⁰ Outwardly uninviting, it becomes gracious and homelike as soon as one enters, for all the rooms open on an inner courtyard and garden. Mumford recognizes in its

⁶ H. H. Richardson, op. cit., pp. 4-5.

⁷ Hitchcock, H. H. Richardson, p. 259.

⁸ Hitchcock, In the Nature of Materials, p. 3.

⁹ Mumford, The South in Architecture, p. 106.

¹⁰ Hitchcock, H. H. Richardson, pp. 277-278.



Fig.48 Photo.H.R.Hitchcock,Jr.
The Olesner House, Chicago, Illinois,1885



Fig.49
Fenway Bridge, Boston



Fig.50

Fenway Bridge, Boston



Fig.51 Photo.L.Mumford
The Pray Building

functional austerity a "new sense of modern form"¹¹ in keeping with the demands of a machine age.

It was not the first time that Richardson showed his appreciation of the new principles inherent in the use of new materials. In 1880 he had been commissioned to build a railroad bridge in the Fenway of Boston. It was in reality two bridges, one across water which he built in simple, graciously curved, unadorned masonry (Fig. 49), and a second across a railroad track and a street, which he built of metal (Fig. 50). He used the plainest supports for the metal trusses carrying the roadbed, and added a simple decorative iron balustrade. A central masonry support completed the ensemble.¹² Hitchcock points out that no American architect of Richardson's time, or indeed of later times, would have left the metal bridge as he did, just as it had been designed by the engineers.¹³ He adds: "This bridge is the best argument that could be offered, in addition to the Harrison Avenue store designed in the last months of Richardson's life, that had he lived longer he would have found as early as did Sullivan an appropriate architectural expression for skyscraper metal skeleton construction."¹⁴

The Harrison Avenue Store, built by F. L. Ames (1886) and occupied by J. H. Pray and Sons (Fig. 51), is not mentioned by Mrs. van Rensselaer, but its importance for the modern development has been stressed by present day critics.¹⁵ It has an emphasis on large, unbroken expanses of windows, and an effect of lightness produced by thinning the piers, making the window reveals shallow, and widening the bays, which would characterize the steel frame construction of the future.¹⁶ Behrendt considers this "perhaps the best and certainly the most important of his

¹¹ Mumford, The South in Architecture, p. 106.

¹² Hitchcock, H. H. Richardson, p. 214.

¹³ Ibid., p. 215.

¹⁴ Ibid., note 5.

¹⁵ Mumford, The Brown Decades, p. 125, and Behrendt, op. cit., p. 113.

¹⁶ Mumford, The Brown Decades, p. 126.

works."¹⁷ It was designed only a year later than the Marshall Field Building, yet it is not nearly so heavy and solid-looking as was the Field Building. The mental alertness of Richardson, and his capacity for constant improvement, are nowhere more evident than in this last significant step toward the future on the eve of his death.

The Marshall Field Wholesale Store in Chicago, begun in 1884, has been reserved until the end of this discussion for several reasons. First, it is the best known of all his works, more universally regarded as his masterpiece than any other. Second, it was, together with the Pittsburgh Buildings, judged his greatest work by Richardson himself.¹⁸ Third, because it was located in Chicago, it had a great influence on the generation of architects now known as "the Chicago School," who profited most by Richardson's example. It was, therefore, the link between Richardson and modern architecture.¹⁹

Although American practicality has since destroyed this building to make room for a parking space,²⁰ critics have grown lyrical about the plain, massive structure, so different in spirit from Richardson's earlier works (Fig. 52). Louis Sullivan, in a poetic vein, wrote: "... stone and mortar, here, spring into life, and are no more material and sordid things. . . . wholesomeness is there, the breath of life is there, an elemental urge is there."²¹ He did not hesitate to call it "an oasis" in the desert of the architecture of his day, nor to pay it the even higher compliment of indebtedness in his own work.²² Yet there was nothing radical in the structure of the Field Building. It was a masonry cage, with masonry supporting

¹⁷

Op. cit., p. 113.

¹⁸

Hitchcock, H. H. Richardson, p. 273.

¹⁹

Carl Condit, The Rise of the Skyscraper (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1952), p. 81.

²⁰

Giedion, op. cit., p. 10.

²¹

Louis Sullivan, Kindergarten Chats (Lawrence, Kansas, 1934), p. 15.

²²

Burford Pickens, "H. H. Richardson and Basic Form Concepts in Modern Architecture" Art Quarterly, III (1940), 288.



Fig.52

Photo C. Condit

The Marshall Field Wholesale Store, Chicago, 1885-1887

walls, a quite adequate expression, neither reactionary nor especially novel, for a seven story building. The inner court was surrounded by masonry walls, and the main partitions also were of masonry.²³ Only the interior piers and floor beams were of metal. It was built during the very years when William Le Baron Jenney was completing his revolutionary Home Insurance Building, the precursor of the true skyscraper.²⁴ Why, then, was the Field Building so significant? Hitchcock answers:

. . . in the Marshall Field Wholesale Store he was offered a commercial commission of sufficient size and importance for him to establish a new standard of design the very year after a new type of construction had been introduced in the field. . . . in the next few years it helped Sullivan to find an architectural expression for the new skeleton type of construction.²⁵

Richardson's achievement, therefore, can best be assessed by a study of the exterior of the Field Building, which at first sight could be so misleading in its simplicity.²⁶ It was built of red sandstone, with the basement of rock-faced Missouri red granite.²⁷ The plain and massive stone wall which Giedion so loves to emphasize as a basic element in American architecture²⁸ was here opened up in wide expanses of windows, grouped in a subtly planned rhythm that betrayed the sure touch of a master of space relationships.²⁹ Wide corner piers ensured an appearance of solidity. Otherwise, the rhythm established by the window arrangement was equal throughout the first four stories, doubled on the next two and quadrupled on the top. Subdivisions³⁰ in the lower story windows made the design proportionately more balanced. Its massiveness and simplicity, and the direct honesty with which the masonry

²³ Hitchcock, H. H. Richardson, p. 273.

²⁴ Condit, op. cit., p. 14.

²⁵ Hitchcock, H. H. Richardson, p. 273 (underlining mine).

²⁶ Schuyler, American Architecture, p. 132.

²⁷ Hitchcock, H. H. Richardson, p. 276.

²⁸ Giedion, op. cit., p. 285.

²⁹ Pickens, op. cit., p. 281.

³⁰ Hitchcock, H. H. Richardson, p. 276.

construction was made evident on the exterior, were its most distinguishing marks.³¹
 There was almost no ornament. A few simple capitals in the piers, the mullions of
 the attic, and a leaf form in the cornice sufficed.³² Hitchcock adds:

There are many other subtleties of omission and commission which express the personal assurance of a great architect at the height of his powers. But there is almost nothing for imitators to borrow. The design is so elementary that any attempt to copy it was bound to be inferior.³³

Among those who looked at the completed Marshall Field Building with more than a layman's curiosity was a young man whose name has become one of the most significant in the history of modern architecture. Louis Henry Sullivan, Massachusetts born, of Irish-French parentage, had come to Chicago with an intellectual equipment rather different from that of his contemporaries. A rebel from his youth, he had left the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to study in Paris, and had worked for a while in Philadelphia for Frank Furness, whose architectural lawlessness³⁴ appealed to him. Drawn to Chicago by the opportunities afforded after the Great Fire of 1870, he had wandered about the streets examining the new buildings, and learning the names of their architects. In this way he singled out William Le Baron Jenney as the man for whom he wished to work, and succeeded in getting a position in his office.³⁵ When, after some time, he left to go into partnership with Dankmar Adler, who was a perfect complement for his mercurial nature,³⁶ he was ready to begin the period of development that bore the most obvious testimony to Richardson's influence.

The Marshall Field Building was to Sullivan a confirmation in actual stone and mortar of the principle upon which he was already attempting to build his

³¹ Schuyler, American Architecture, p. 132.

³² Ibid.

³³ Hitchcock, H. H. Richardson, p. 277.

³⁴ Mumford, The Brown Decades, p. 144.

³⁵ Hugh Morrison, Louis Sullivan (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1935), p. 39.

³⁶ Mumford, The Brown Decades, p. 149.

philosophy of architecture, and which has become the slogan of the modern movement—form follows function. Its reaction upon his own building was immediately evident, especially in the Auditorium (Fig. 53), begun the year of Richardson's death.³⁷

This famous structure, which established the reputation of Adler and Sullivan, owed its engineering excellence and fine acoustics to Adler and its design to Sullivan.³⁸ From the Syrian arches of the doorways and the rock-faced stone of the lower stories, to the arrangement of the windows in almost the same rhythmic patterns as Richardson's, Sullivan gave eloquent testimony of his admiration for the Field Building.³⁹ This factor attains the utmost significance when one considers that, before 1886, Adler and Sullivan's work showed no indebtedness to Richardson⁴⁰ at all.

In the Walker Warehouse, begun in 1888 (Fig. 54), Sullivan advanced beyond mere imitation, "drawing inspiration and not precedent from the Marshall Field Store."⁴¹ He had learned from Richardson how to emphasize abstract form⁴² rather than ornament, and scale and proportion rather than detail. For the rest, he was destined to break new pathways never explored by Richardson, and ultimately to develop, in his skyscraper of the next decade, new forms appropriate to the new materials that Richardson never used.

Hardly any of the Chicago School remained entirely uninfluenced by⁴³ Richardson, but the most gifted among them benefited most. John Wellborn Root, perhaps as brilliant and articulate as Sullivan, and certainly more willing to

³⁷

Hitchcock, In the Nature of Materials, p. 8.

³⁸

Larkin, op. cit., p. 290.

³⁹

Pickens, op. cit., p. 288.

⁴⁰

Hitchcock, In the Nature of Materials, p. 8.

⁴¹

Hitchcock, H. H. Richardson, p. 277.

⁴²

Pickens, op. cit., pp. 287-288.

⁴³

Condit, op. cit., p. 81.



Fig. 53
The Auditorium, Chicago

Photo C. Condit
Adler and Sullivan



Fig. 54
The Walker Warehouse, Chicago, 1888-1889

Photo C. Condit
L. Sullivan

acknowledge his indebtedness, began by imitating the Romanesque ornament of Richardson.⁴⁴ He ended by incorporating his principles into his own building. Like Sullivan, Root had as his partner a man whose business sense and practical outlook had a steadying influence on his artistic nature. Daniel Burnham was, moreover, devoted to his talented young friend. Together they built the old Art Institute,⁴⁵ the Masonic Temple (Fig. 55) and other structures in Richardsonian Romanesque. (Figs. 56, 57) Gradually they followed Richardson's lead in the direction of simplification and carried it beyond what Richardson had done. The Monadnock Block (Fig. 58) was the ultimate expression of simplified masonry construction. Beyond it there was nowhere to go, except into true skeleton construction. Root, who designed the Monadnock, was partly indebted for its elemental form to the owner, who insisted that there be no non-essentials. But the beauty of proportion, the stark, clean⁴⁶ silhouette, are Root's own.

Root was clever and gifted, with a most attractive personality. Had he lived, his natural leadership as well as his intellectual and artistic capabilities would have caused him to continue to be a potent force in shaping America's architectural future. He would have brought to their logical fulfillment the principles so well illustrated by Richardson. But he died in 1891.

Frank Lloyd Wright acknowledges indebtedness to no one but Louis Sullivan, whom he always called "the Master." Consequently, when he ranks Richardson and Root as "the only peers"⁴⁷ of Sullivan he pays them no small compliment. As for Wright's own estimate of himself, the tart comment of Thomas Tallmadge, "The world honors Frank Lloyd Wright and smiles indulgently at his quaint belief that he

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Mumford, The Brown Decades, p. 132.

⁴⁵

Tallmadge, op. cit., pp. 184-185.

⁴⁶

Condit, op. cit., pp. 101-102.

⁴⁷

Frank Lloyd Wright, An Autobiography, (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1932), p. 266.



Fig.55
Masonic Temple, Chicago, 1891

Photo.C.Condit
Burnham and Root



Fig.56 Photo.C.Condit
The Rookery, Chicago 1885-1886
Burnham and Root



Fig.57 Photo.C.Condit
The Woman's Temple, Chicago Burnham and Root



Fig.58 **Photo.C.Condit**
The Monednock Block,Chicago Burnham and Root

invented architecture,"⁴⁸ is not entirely unjustified. To Wright it is unthinkable that he should be measured against Richardson, whom he dismisses as "the great emotional revivalist of Romanesque."⁴⁹ Yet there are few critics of American architecture who fail to link their names together as great and original forces in the development of sound architecture. To us of the twentieth century the bold forms of Wright may seem more daring, more creative than the now dreary sandstone or granite structures of Richardson. But in the work of each, the same understanding of fine building is evident, however different the ultimate expression may be. The long, low, horizontal lines of Wright's prairie houses, and his brilliant use of varied textures, seem much more modern than the lines of the Paine House or the treatment of the Ames Gate Lodge,⁵⁰ but the principles employed are much the same.

Root, Sullivan and Wright are the principal exponents of the beneficent influence of Richardson. There were, besides, those who imitated his more obviously "Romanesque" mannerisms, without, however, grasping the full import of his original thought. These have a place in the recital of Richardson's life and influence, but not in its relation to the modern movement for, whereas Richardson's Romanesque style always exhibited an organic growth, the increasing elaboration and confused application of ornament on the part of many of his imitators proved their lack of comprehension of his aims.⁵¹

In addition there were others whose reaction to his influence cannot be ignored. His former pupils, Charles Follen McKim and Stanford White, became his independent rivals and ultimately the advocates of that return to classic forms which eventually brought about the downfall of the organic development their former master

48

Tallmadge, op. cit., p. 230.

49

F. L. Wright, op. cit., p. 266.

50

Pickens, op. cit., p. 288.

51

James Marston Fitch, American Building (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1948), p. 114.

had done so much to foster.⁵² The Boston Public Library, standing in complacent self-sufficiency opposite Trinity Church on Copley Square, remains as a substantial symbol of their triumph (Fig. 59).⁵³ The princely palaces of Newport reflect every phase of their work (Figs. 60, 61, 62). The Pennsylvania Station in New York, taking its inspiration from the Baths of Caracalla, or the Pierpont Morgan Library, a gem of classic good taste or the embodiment of sterile eclecticism, depending on one's point of view, testify to the popularity of McKim, Mead and White in the metropolis that boasts no building by Richardson.⁵⁴

The eclecticism and romanticism of the nineteenth century have long since run their course. The technical advances which have revolutionized building in the twentieth century have presented entirely new problems to be solved, new materials to be utilized, calling for new designs to express their nature. The organic growth implicit in Richardson's work and that of his interpreters, Sullivan and Root, which was succeeded by the ordered classicism of the turn of the century, has triumphed again in the architecture of the present day. From our vantage point three quarters of a century after the death of Richardson, it now seems possible to assess in its true perspective, the importance of Richardson's role in the development of contemporary architecture.

⁵² Tallmadge, op. cit., p. 238.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 236.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 242-244.



Fig.59
Detail of Boston Public Library
Mc Kim, Mead and White



Fig.60
Home of E.D.Morgan, Newport, R.I., 1891
McKim, Mead and White



Fig.61
Home of Samuel Colman Newport, R.I., 1883
McKim, Mead and White



Fig.62
Home of H. Oelrichs Newport, 1902
McKim, Mead and White

CONCLUSION

Richardson's influence on the modern movement in architecture was a very real though limited one. It was limited by his romantic temperament and interests, by the circumstances of the times in which he lived, and by the materials with which he worked, as contrasted with the materials used in the twentieth century.

Richardson was a real builder, not merely a designer or draftsman.¹ His own development was an organic growth, not a mere series of accretions. Consequently, his influence on those who understood him was bound to be a stimulus in their search for the fundamental principles of sound building. By his experiments in the field of fenestration alone, he paved the way for Sullivan's solution in both the Auditorium and the Wainwright Buildings, although he did not in any way influence the structure of either.² To practically every architect of the nineteenth century, a window was thought of as an opening in a wall, to be judiciously placed as a pleasing accent for the exterior. To Richardson, for all his love of unbroken walls of rough and massive masonry, a window, or better still, a group of windows treated as a unit (as in the Albany City Hall, Sever Hall, the Quincy Library and the court of the Pittsburgh Courthouse),³ was intended to light the interior. He placed it where it would do so to best advantage, without ignoring the effect from the exterior. But, - and here his romantic individualism served him in good stead, - he did not hesitate to sacrifice mathematical symmetry in its placement if a greater good were to be served. Gradually, as he grew surer and bolder, and the purpose of the building demanded it (as in the Field and Pray buildings), he tended to treat the

¹ Behrendt, op. cit., p. 106.

² Condit, op. cit., p. 104.

³ Mumford, The Brown Decades, p. 120.

window as the mid-twentieth century architect does. The wall spaces between the windows became quite subordinate to the expanse of glass. It remained for his successors only to substitute new materials. The manner of expression was provided by him.

Giedion makes much of the American use of the flexible floor plan.⁴ Frank Lloyd Wright's treatment of it seems to be its ultimate expression. Perhaps he would have used it as he does whether Richardson had experimented with new arrangements or not. Certainly there was precedent enough from earliest colonial times. Yet Richardson's charming interpretations in the wooden homes and cottages for which he is so justly praised are certainly an enrichment of the tradition.⁵ The low-flung lines of his houses and the rambling, yet rational character of their floor plans⁶ may well have compelled the admiration of Wright.

His influence, though real, was limited. His very choice of the Romanesque style at the outset of his career pointed out the nature of his self imposed limitations. He devoted himself to restoring soundness and esthetic quality to architecture, rather than to experimenting with new materials.⁷ He could achieve the results that interested him by using traditional masonry construction. Had he lived longer, he might have been impelled to try his hand with metal skeleton construction, if for no other reason than for the joy of solving a new problem. But experimentation with new materials had not gone far enough before his death to be of interest to one who had not nearly finished saying all that he had to express with stone and wood.

His romantic temperament also militated against his having a lasting influence. To him, as to so many other gifted individuals, the development of a personal style, the expression of a personal genius, was an obstacle in the transmission

⁴ Giedion, op. cit., p. 278.

⁵ Mumford, The Brown Decades, p. 51.

⁶ Mumford, The South in Architecture, p. 104.

⁷ Behrendt, op. cit., p. 107.

of his message.⁸ The foundation of a school of disciples capable of carrying out his principles would have been easier had he not been "unique".⁹ As it was, his imitators followed the line of least resistance, copied his rough courses of stone, his Syrian arches, and his simply carved capitals, and missed the broad principles that, if followed, would have led to further development.¹⁰ Only Sullivan, Root and Wright extracted the essence of what he was trying to do.

Richardson's influence was also limited by the circumstances of the times in which he lived, and of the years following his death. He died at an age when most architects are just beginning to exert their greatest influence.¹¹ John Well-born Root, who might have caught his mantle, died young also, and at a most critical juncture in the history of American architecture. Had Root lived, he would probably have been the guiding genius in the planning of the Chicago World's Fair of 1893. Because of his death, the decisions fell to the most prominent American architects then living, the popular eclectics of the Eastern seaboard. Richard Morris Hunt and McKim, Mead and White have been roundly condemned by most admirers of Sullivan and Wright. A middle and more charitable course is here, as in most things, more likely to be just. They were not insincere riders of the waves of success. If they had not been honest seekers of beauty, hardworking and conscientious men, they would hardly have appealed, not only to the architecturally unlettered American public, but also to the elite. They were no better, and no worse, than their fathers. They were simply not giants like Richardson, Sullivan, Root and Wright. The giants provide the inspiration upon which lesser minds feed for many years afterwards, but how many ordinary folk can afford to pay for their visions or wait for their muses?¹² Wright is a genius who has brought such prestige to his country as it has long

8

Ibid., pp. 109-110.

9

Hitchcock, H. H. Richardson, p. 265.

10

Schuyler, American Architecture, p. 154.

11

Hitchcock, H. H. Richardson, p. 290.

12

Mumford, The Brown Decades, p. 173.

awaited. But beautiful and original as his buildings are, are they not, like himself, too individual to form the basis of a lasting movement?

On the other hand, the circumstances which placed Hunt, McKim and the rest in positions of authority at the Chicago World's Fair were hardly fortunate, even though St. Gaudens hailed one of their meetings as the greatest assembly of artists since the fifteenth century!¹³ The well-meant classicism of McKim's Agricultural Building, Hunt's Administration Building, and Atwood's exquisite Palace of Fine Arts dealt a death blow to anything creative that American architects had been doing or meant to do. Sullivan's Transportation Building, the only original contribution there, was but imperfectly understood. The young and vibrant Chicago School that had arisen on the ashes of the fire of 1870 was doomed by the Exposition buildings erected in its own city. With it died all that was best of Richardson's influence.

13

Tallmadge, op. cit., p. 202.

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